1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

ripening); most of the larger muscles were already gnawed away, leaving loose ends of fiber and strings of tendon clinging to the bone, the condition being such that the remaining flesh might easily have been cut and scraped away by means of a knife; yet whenever a warrior or woman or youth hungered he or she took down the heavy joint, squatted or sat on the ground with back to one side of the doorway, held the mass at the height of the mouth, and gnawed, sucked, and swallowed, frequently tearing the tissue by twisting and backward jerks of the head, and not only masticating, but swallowing the free ends of tendons still attached to the bone. This process was varied only by seizing with the hands and tearing off a strip of flesh or skin already loosened by the teeth; and it was continued until the bones were practically clean, when they were wrenched apart by the stronger men in order that the cartilaginous cushions and epiphyses might be gnawed away. The only approach to cooking or carving was a parboiling of the foot, after the leg was wrenched off at the hock, until the hoof was sufficiently softened to be knocked off with the protolithic hupf[1] shown in plate XLIII, when half a dozen matrons and well-grown maidens gathered about to gnaw the gelatinous tissue (already softened by incipient decay as well as by the parboiling) investing the coffin bone. The entire procedure in this as in many other cases proclaimed the absence of knife-sense. The Caucasian huntsman does not have to think of his knife when game is to be bled or skinned or dissected; his habit-trained hand knows where to find the implement, how to seize it, and in most cases how to wield it advantageously; but the Seri hand possesses no such cunning, and uses the knife only clumsily and at second thought, if at all. The Seri huntsman, on the other hand, does not have to think of nails and teeth, for they are trained and coordinated by hereditary habit to spontaneously act in unison and with the utmost possible or needful vigor; while the Caucasian at least has completely lost the claw-and-teeth instinct of offense and defense.

Conformably with their striking independence of knives, the Seri are conspicuously unskilful in all mechanical operations involving the use of tools. Their most elaborate manufacture is the balsa, made from reeds broken at the butts and with the leaves and tops removed by the hands or by fire, bound together with hand-made cords; next in elaborateness come the bow and arrow, normally made without cutting tools; then follows their fictile ware, which is made wholly by hand, without aid of the simple molds and paddles and other devices used by neighboring tribes; while their primitive fabrics were apparently of hand-extracted fibers, twisted and woven wholly by hand, with the aid of wood or bone perforators in sewing and possibly in weaving. Practically the Seri possess but a single tool, and this is applied to a peculiarly wide variety of purposes—it is the originally natural cobble used for crushing bones and severing tendons, for grinding seeds and

[1] Pictured postea, p. 166.

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

and the shell-strata are so like and so different from any other fictile ware as to be distinguished at a glance. Hence it would seem manifest that the Seri olla must constitute a normal nucleus for the Seri esthetic; yet even here the field is practically barren, as is shown by the study of a score of usable and mortuary specimens and of thousands of sherds. The most ornate specimen seen is that depicted in plate XXXII. Its form, like that of the balsa, is a mechanical equation of forces and materials; its body-color is that of the clay, blotched and blackened irregularly by the smoke of the firing; and its decoration is limited to 17 faint lines or bands radiating downward from the ill-shaped neck. The radial bands were evidently drawn by a finger dipped in clayey water after the vessel was otherwise finished for the firing; they are irregular in placement, width, length, and direction; they generally run in pairs, two straight lines alternating with two zigzag lines, though the circuit is completed by two zigzags drawn wide apart and separated by a single straight line. The meaning of the device (if meaning there be) was not directly ascertained; but it is suggestive that its maker and owner was the mother of the youthful warrior from whom the rattlesnake necklace was obtained (her face-symbol is that shown in the lower left figure of plate XXVI), and that the vessel was surrendered more reluctantly than any other article obtained from the tribe.

Another utensil of some importance to the tribe is a basket of the type illustrated in figure 24. It is manufactured with much skill and is used for various domestic purposes, being practically water-tight and unbreakable, and materially lighter than even the unparalleledly light fictile ware of the Seri. In form and size and weave the half dozen examples seen correspond with widespread southwestern types; yet it is noteworthy that while otherwise similar baskets are habitually decorated by other basket-making tribes, the Seri specimens were absolutely devoid of decorative devices.

Practically the only remaining artifacts available for decoration are those connected with archery; and it suffices to say that while the bows are skilfully made and the arrows constructed with exceeding pains, not a single specimen seen showed the slightest trace of symbolism or of nonutilitarian motive.

Summarily, the Seri are characterized by extreme esthetic poverty. This has been noted by the early missionaries and by the few other travelers who have approached their haunts, as well as by the vaqueros on the Encinas and Serna and other ranchos bordering their range, who know them as "los pobrecitos". All observers have been struck with their destitution and squalor; yet when the impressions are particularized they are seen to denote absence of the poor luxuries, rather than the bare necessities, of primitive life. The people are pathetically poor in the industrial sense; their equipment in artifacts—implements, weapons, utensils, habitations, apparel—is meager almost, if not quite, beyond parallel in America; yet their esthetic equipment, practically

I: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

even the ware of the wide-wandering Papago is more extravagant than that of the Seri in the ratio of 100 to 84. It is noteworthy, too, that the typical Seri ware is much more uniform than that of the other tribes; the various specimens seen in use at Costa Rica, and nearly entire in various parts of Seriland, were closely similar in form and nearly alike in dimensions; while the innumerable smaller fragments scattered over Seriland and the neighboring "despoblado" or buried amid the shells of Punta Antigualla correspond precisely in thickness, in curvature, in material, and in finish with the ware observed in use.

Neither the manufacture of the ware nor the sources of material have been observed by Caucasians. Examination of the specimens indicates that the material is a fine and somewhat micaceous clay, apparently an adobe derived from granitoid rocks; and such material might be

Ratio of capacity to weight among Indian ollas[1]

	Capacity	Weight	Ratio	Mean ratio
Seri:	*Liters*	*Kilograms*		
Plain	15.14	1.91	0.126	0.137
Painted	15.61	2.30	.147	
Papago:				
No. 1	17.03	4.00	.230	.233
No. 2	8.51	2.36	.279	
Sia	15.14	3.82	.252	.271
Zuñi	13.30	3.18	.258	
Acoma	15.61	4.31	.276	
Hopi	13.72	4.06	.295	

obtained in various parts of Seriland. The structure of the ware reveals no trace of coiling or other building process, nor does the texture clearly attest the beating process employed by the Papago potters; but there is a well-defined lamellar structure, and the surfaces (especially inner) are striated circumferentially or spirally in such manner as to suggest a process of rubbing under considerable pressure. All the specimens are so asymmetric as to indicate the absence of mechanical devices approaching the potter's wheel, while the necks are of such size as to admit the hand and forearm of an adult female but not of a warrior. Some suggestion of the manufacturing process is afforded by miniature fetishistic and mortuary specimens, such as those depicted in figures 17 and 18, and the larger specimens shown in figure 39, which were evidently shaped from lumps of suitable clay first hollowed and then gradually expanded by manipulation with the fingers, with little if any aid from implements of any sort. On putting the various indi-

[1] In this table the ratio is expressed by the weight in kilograms for each liter in capacity. The Papago and Pueblo specimens were selected from typical material in the National Museum and at random, save that in the Pueblo silos choice was made of specimens corresponding approximately in size with those of the Seri.

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

On putting the indi-
323 [462] cations together it would seem probable that the ware is made by the women, and that each piece is shaped from a lump of tempered and well-kneaded clay of suitable size, first hollowed and rudely shaped over one hand, and gradually expanded by spiral rubbing, kneading, and pressure between the hands of the maker. The burning is incomplete and variable, suggesting a little outdoor fire in a shallow pit adapted to a single vessel. The ware is without glaze or slip or other surficial treatment save that the lamellar texture is best developed toward the surfaces; hence it is so porous that the filled vessel is moist even in the sun.

482 [462] Ordinarily women are the water-bearers, each carrying an olla balanced on the head with the aid of a slightly elastic annular cushion, usually fashioned of yucca fiber (plate XXXII and figure 15), though in some cases two ollas are slung in nets at the ends of a yoke (figure 16) after the Chinese coolie fashion (this device being apparently acultural).

FIG. 15.—Seri olla ring.

415 The function of the conventional Seri olla is exclusively that of a canteen or water-carrying vessel, and its form is suited to no other use; while its lines, like its thinness of wall, are adapted to the stresses of internal and external pressure in such wise as to give maximum strength with minimum weight. It is by reason of this remarkably delicate adaptation of materials to purposes that the plain olla figured in plate XXXIII, weighing an ounce or two more than 10 pounds in dry air, holds and safely carries three and one-third times its weight of water. When such ollas are broken, the larger pieces may be used as cups or

FIG. 16.—Water-bearer's yoke.

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

dishes, or even as kettles, in the rare culinary operations of the tribe (as shown in plate X); but the entire vessels appear to be religiously devoted to their primary purpose.

While some three-fourths of the observed fictile ware of the Seri and a still larger proportion of the scattered sherds represent conventional ollas, there are a few erratic forms. The most conspicuous of these is a smaller, thicker-walled, and larger-necked type, of which three or four examples were observed; two of these were in use (one is represented lying at the left of the jacal in plate X), and another was found cracked and abandoned on the desert east of Playa Noriega. The vessels of this type are used primarily as kettles and only incidentally as canteens. In both form and function they suggest accultural origin; but the ware is much like that of the conventional type. Another erratic type takes the form of a deep dish or shallow bowl, of rather thick walls and clumsy form, which may be accultural; a single example was observed in use (it is shown in plate XIV). There are also mortuary forms, including a miniature olla (figure 39) and bowl (figure 41), and such still smaller examples as those illustrated in figures 17 and 18. In addition to the utensils a few fictile figurines were found. Most of these were crude or distorted animal effigies, and one (broken) was a rudely shaped and strongly caricatured female figure some 2 inches high, with exaggerated breasts and pudenda. Analogy with neighboring tribes suggests that the very small vessels and the figurines are fetishistic appurtenances to the manufacture of the pottery; e. g., that the fetish is molded at the same time and from the same material as the olla, and is then burned with it, theoretically as an invocation against cracking or other injury, but practically as a "draw-piece" for testing the progress of the firing.

FIG. 17.—Symbolic mortuary olla.

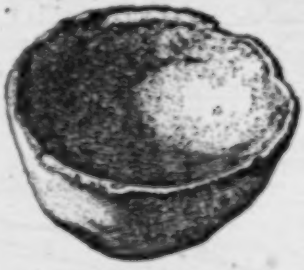

FIG. 18.—Symbolic mortuary dish.

By far the most numerous of the utensils connected with potable water are drinking-cups and small bowls or dishes; but these are merely molluscan shells of convenient size, picked up alongshore, used once or oftener, and either discarded or carried habitually without other treatment than the natural wear of use (an example is illustrated in figure 19). Larger bowls or trays are improvised from entire carapaces of the tortoise (probably *Gopherus agassizii*), which are carried considerable distances; and still larger emergency water-vessels consist of carapaces of the green turtle (*Chelonia agas-*

2: Kroeber E-5 (1930) 1931 NU31 Seri NU31

it was set up by an archer in front of himself, or carried for him by another man. At any rate it suggests open fighting besides raids and ambushes. 714

Pottery, which is thin, porous, and reddish-buff to gray, was not seen made. The clay is said to be tempered with jackrabbit or horse dung. The vessel is started, apparently by coiling, in a dish or receptacle. It is certainly built up by coiling, the sausages being somewhat less than the thickness of a finger. It dries fast, the bottom becoming somewhat hard as the top is being built. The coils are smoothed as they are added, with a stone inside, a shell to scrape the outside. A paddle is not used. The vessel is further smoothed with the stone and dried for a day. It is fired with wood, sufficient manure being unavailable on the island. 323 ● [372]

312 of four miles by a rough and stony trail. In
482 other parts of the island, habitations were occupied as distant as 15 miles from the nearest watering places. Under these conditions the Seris became essentially and primarily water carriers, and all their other industries were subordinated to this function.
[271] They learned to economize on water carrying by gulping incredible quantities on their occasional visits to the aguajes, yet, more than half of the water required in their vital economy was consumed after transportation over distances of four to twelve miles. The
312 women were ordinarily the water bearers and
482 for this important business manufactured a
323 distinctive vessel for the purpose. From fine adobe clay they hollowed, expanded and shaped by manipulation with the fingers and without the aid of implements of any sort, a large olla of remarkably light weight in proportion to its capacity. Its mouth was made no larger than the hand that shaped it.
482 thus to prevent spilling on the trail. From yucca fiber a cylindrical cushion was also

[p. 196(B)]

[text continues on p. 197(B)]

462 desert plants or littoral fishlets from tide-pools or of the shellfish. Both men and women will [224] bring in an occasional rattler, although women [857] are more likely to do this because they spend more [883] time in the desert. Children of both sexes are engaged in the female occupations here, but adolescent boys already join in their fathers' hunts on land or sea.

342 Housing has undergone some changes. In the 184 desert or on Tiburon the Indians construct the kind of shelter they did in the recorded past, an ocotillo frame, bent over in the middle and covered up with dried plant debris and twigs from the desert, or with the sail cloth. But in Desemboque they have more substantial houses—of wattle and adobe, with flat roofs, rectangular or square, often with corrugated tin or drift planks and other debris piled up on top, or along the walls.

178 In the remainder of their material culture, not much has been left from years past although one must remember that from the very beginning of recorded Serian history it has been of a most [291] meager sort. Pelican robes, which some Seris ap- [412] parently still wore in 1930 are gone for good. So are the stone tools. So is the pottery which had [323] probably disappeared in Kroeber's time. The hu- [301] man hair necklace with rattlesnake rattles is also a thing of the past. The rattlesnake skin belts [291] McGee (1898:170) described and figured are probably all gone. I havn't seen or heard of any.

412 But what remains much as they had been in 285 1894 are the bone-awls. These are made of burros' carpals and the blossoming of basketry, owing to

[p. 8A]

285 [824] I watched a woman make a basket. She used young branches from the terote tree, I think *terote blanco*. The bark was peeled and shredded into two parts, the heart taken out and kept separate. The coils of the round part were put in a pot of hot water to soften, and the edge of the basket was soaked a little in hot water. The center of the coils or woof consisted of six or eight strips of heart while the outer sap wood was woven around in regular coil-weave fashion.

[237] [412] A brad of deer shin-bone sharpened on pumice to a needle point was used as a brad. With this brad she split the fiber, held one piece in her mouth, and stripped the back down. Then she punched a hole in the bone brad, inserted the sharp end of the fiber and pulled it almost through. She then repeated the operation, adding a strip of heart once in a while. These baskets are coarse and unattractive, but they are hard and tough and stand heavy use.

• 323 Cooking vessels consist of two or three cooking ollas that nest together to facilitate transportation. These are made of coarse clay, solely for utility without regard for beauty of shape, color or design. In burning these ollas they use the shell of the sea turtle. [237] [372] The cells of the shell are filled with a fine oil and this burns the ollas. On most of the other places on the mainland, the Indians use cow chips, or dried droppings to fire the clay.

283 484 123 [277] We proposed to shift camp to Tinajanita, our first landing place, where Herrera was to meet us in two days with the Chief and some of his men. Since it was blowing, he said the men couldn't fish and they would be on land probably hunting, so he would be able to see them. At this time they gathered *sescal* on an island off the west coast to make the liquor they used at fiestas, weddings and other celebrations.

Herrera left at five o'clock in the morning, with a swinging gait, for the opposite side of the Island. The distance around by boat would be fifty miles, and across, only about twenty or twenty-five---a full day's trip and hard, as mountains would have to be crossed and the rocks were sharp and the way difficult.

123 We had breakfast on rice and bread. Our rations are running low and we expect to move this morning. We made arrangements about the native boat and saw Blanco trot off with two five-gallon cans for water, a distance of ten miles. We went to the camp to get a few things---an old basket, a Pelican hide and other things, and then we asked the help of everybody to get the boat down to water---the tide was very low. The one man, the women and five of us were required to drag and push the boat to water.

We waved goodbye, loaded her up and then rowed against the tide and wind for miles, and finally landed in a lovely sheltered lagoon, built our fire and had lunch. A few crabs were speared, and late in the afternoon the wind shifted. We loaded the boat again and pushed off for Tinajanita, our first landing place. After rowing, we raised

[text continues on p.174]